In the Specification:

Please amend the specification as follows:

On page 2, the second full paragraph has been amended as follows:

The University of Oklahoma has set up a genome sequencing project for S. pyogenes strain M1 GAS ~~(http://dna1.chem.ou.edu/strep.html)~~.

On page 26, the first full paragraph has been amended as follows:

It was determined that the 3027-bp including a stop codon (TAA) open reading frame (ORF) of BVH-P7 encodes a 1008 amino-acid-residues polypeptide with a predicted pI of 6.18 and a predicted molecular mass of 111,494.44 Da. Analysis of the predicted amino acid residues sequence (SEQ ID NO :2) using the PSORTII sofware (Real World Computing Partnership ~~(http://psort.nibb.ac.jp)~~) suggested the existence of a 21 amino acid residues signal peptide (MKKHLKTVALTLTTVSVVTHN)(SEQ ID NO: 13), which ends with a cleavage site situated between an asparagine and a glutamine residues. Analysis of the amino-acid-residues sequence revealed the presence of a cell wall anchoring motif (LPXTGX) (SEQ ID NO: 14) located ~~bewteen~~ between residues 974 and 981.

The last paragraph bridging pages 26 and 27 has been amended as follows:

To confirm the presence by PCR amplification of BVH-P7 (SEQ ID NO :1) gene, the following 4 serologically distinct S. pyogenes strains were used: the serotype M1 S. pyogenes strain ATCC700294 and the serotype M3 S. pyogenes strain ATCC12384 were obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (Manassas, VA) ~~(Rockville, MD)~~; the serotype M6 S. pyogenes SPY67 clinical isolate was provided by the Centre de recherche en infectiologie du Centre hospitalier

de l'université Laval, Sainte-Foy; and S. pyogenes strain B514 which was initially isolated from a mouse was provided by Susan Hollingshead, from University of Alabama, Birmingham. The E. coli strain XL1-Blue MRF' was used in these experiments as negative control. Chromosomal DNA was isolated from each S. pyogenes strain as previously described (Jayarao BM et al. 1991. J. Clin. Microbiol. 29:2774-2778). BVH-P7 (SEQ ID NO :1) gene was amplified by PCR (Robocycler Gradient 96 Temperature cycler, Stratagene, LaJolla, Ca) from the genomic DNA purified from the 4 S. pyogenes strains, and the control E. coli strain using the oligonucleotide primers DMAR293 and DMAR294 (Table 1). PCR was performed with 30 cycles of 45 sec at 95°C, 45 sec at 50°C and 2 min at 72°C and a final elongation period of 7 min at 72°C. The PCR products were size fractionated in 1% agarose gels and were visualized by ethidium bromide staining. The results of these PCR amplifications are presented in Table 2. The analysis of the amplification products revealed that BVH-P7 (SEQ ID NO :1) gene was present in the genome of all of the 4 S. pyogenes strains tested. No such product was detected when the control E. coli DNA was submitted to identical PCR amplifications with these oligonucleotide primers.

The last paragraph bridging pages 32 and 33 has been amended as follows:

Sera collected from eight mice immunized with BVH-P7 His-tagged recombinant protein were analyzed by cytofluorometry and the results are presented in Table 4. All of the sera collected from mice immunized with purified BVH-P7 His-tagged protein contained BVH-P7-specific antibodies that efficiently recognized their corresponding surface exposed epitopes on the heterologous (ATCC12384; serotype M3) S. pyogenes strain tested. The fluorescence index varied from 10 to 18. It was determined that more than 97 % of the 10,000 S. pyogenes cells analyzed were labeled with the antibodies present in the BVH-P7 specific anti-sera. These sera were also pooled and reacted with the following S. pyogenes strains: serotype M1 S. pyogenes strain ATCC 700294, serotype M3 and serotype M18 S. pyogenes strain ATCC12357 were obtained from the American Type Culture Collection (Manassas, VA) ~~(Rockville, MD, USA)~~; the serotype M6 S. pyogenes SPY69 and M2 S.

pyogenes SPY68 clinical isolates were provided by the Centre de recherche en infectiologie du Centre hospitalier de l'université Laval, Sainte-Foy. The BVH-P7-specific antibodies present in the pool of sera collected after immunization with the purified His-tagged recombinant BVH-P7 protein attached at the bacterial surface of each of these streptococcal strains with fluorescence index between 4 up to 9. On the contrary, no labeling of the streptococcal cells were noted when pools of sera collected from unimmunized or sham-immunized mice were used. These observations clearly demonstrate that the BVH-P7 protein is accessible at the surface where it can be easily recognized by antibodies. Anti-S. pyogenes antibodies were shown to play an important role in the protection against S. pyogenes infection.